

Russell Kelfer
Rebekah
If It Be So,
Then Why?

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Series: God's Living Legends (Part 1)



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If It Be So, Then Why?

We have been walking together through God's word, looking at the men and women God has lifted off the pages of history and specifically placed in the Bible to use as examples. We have chosen to call them "living legends". Today, our Scriptural excursion brings us to the house of a man named Isaac for a look at the life and the legend behind Abraham's promised son.

Already past is the first major test of his life; a hike in the mountains with his dad that became literally a matter of life and death. There we viewed in amazement, a submissive, obedient son. Then God called out a bride for Isaac, and we saw unfold one of the great love stories of the ages.

I guess it would be safe to assume that this model couple, raised by two such godly sets of parents, brought together so demonstrably in answer to prayer; two people so conclusively revealed as the will of God for each other, would set sail on the sea of matrimonial bliss and live happily ever after. Theirs, you would imagine, would be a story book marriage, with trouble-free children, and the absence of those run-of-the-mill, day-to-day frustrations that seem so to characterize the average home.

Look again! Isaac and Rebekah *were* God's special saints chosen for each other with a divine destiny awaiting them, their children, and their children's children. But trouble-free? Not on your life! And so there comes much comfort from the pages of the next few chapters of Scripture for husbands and wives and parents and children, much comfort, I think, even in this story found in Genesis, Chapter 25, verses 19-26. Let's journey together past Isaac's house as their marriage and their family begin to unfold before us.

Our title is taken from verse 22. It's called,
"If It Be So, Then Why?"

Our story begins in verse 19 with these words in the New American Standard version:

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Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham became the father of Isaac;

That sounds like a very matter-of-fact statement when taken out of context, doesn't it? "Abraham became the father of Isaac." Standing by itself, it sounds like all the other members of the begat family. Abraham begat Isaac, Jacob begat Joseph, etc. So often life is like that. It seems so simple on the surface. We make comments like "John and Mary had their baby," with no sensitivity to all that John and Mary went through, and are going through.

Often we don't stop to consider how that birth affected the other children, what their financial needs might be, how lonely Mary might be at home now that her mom is gone. Just a statement of fact: "John and Mary had their baby." (Like the ten o'clock news reporting a robbery.) Here's another: Suzie's sister died. Your sensitive reply: "I'm sorry to hear that. You sure hear of a lot of deaths lately." We're so full of one-liners for replies when our hearts ought to be breaking in two for someone who's hurting.

Or someone says, "Benny lost his job." "Oh, really (yawn), that's too bad," we answer, with no thought to all the agony, all the frustration, all the humiliation Benny must be going through. To the insensitive, these are matter-of-fact statements of incidents or experiences. But, oh, to those who hurt for others, who go beneath the surface, they say so much more. Yes, Abraham became the father of Isaac, but four chapters of Scripture, 100 years of history, and Ishmael are all wrapped up in that sentence. Think about it the next time someone makes a one-line statement that describes one of life's deeper experiences, and stop and ask God to enlarge your vision of that person's need. Ask for Christian x-ray eyes to see through the facts to their feelings. That is the Gospel: to weep with those who weep, to rejoice with those who rejoice. The next verse spans 40 more years:

And Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Armean of Paddanaram, the sister of Laban the Armean, to be his wife. (Genesis 25:20 NAS)

See what I mean? There's chapter 24, that beautiful love story, boiled down to one sentence. It loses a lot in the condensation, doesn't it? And if we don't bother, in the Scriptures and in lives, to go beyond the surface and find the *whole* story, we miss it all.

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Now another twenty years passes between verse 20 and verse 21, as we shall see in a moment. And we can only imagine those twenty years and how they affected Isaac and Rebekah and their marriage. But God places the same burden on Isaac that He did on Abraham! Verse 21 begins:

And Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren.

You say, “But why?” Everybody has children. Why do God’s chosen seem to sometimes have such a difficult time? I’ll tell you why! Because the key to the womb is in the hands of a sovereign God. He alone opens and closes it at will. And the key is used with special purposes for His special people. How often in Scripture we read, “God opened the womb” or “God closed the womb”. Through His control of the womb, He draws men and women to a state of humility, dependence, and respect. God withheld children from Isaac and Rebekah as He had from Abraham and Sarah. You say, why does God do that? I believe God does that for at least three reasons:

1- It proves ownership. All children belong to God. “Children are an heritage of the Lord,” (Psalm 129:3). By controlling when they are born, He reminds us of His seal of ownership.

2- It reveals God’s will through His perfect timing. Only God knows WHEN and IF giving birth will accrue maximum glory to His name, as it did for Abraham and Sarah, as it did at the birth of Jesus. Withholding children or closing the womb may reveal the will of God by controlling the timing of God and thus give most glory to God.

3- If God controls the womb, then, when the womb is closed, God’s children must humble themselves in prayer before God and ask for children. Thus, God has their undivided attention. He has them in a state of dependence. He requires that they ask and thus can give only Him the glory when the child is born, and also can trust Him for whatever happens to that child. Now it is not always God’s will that a couple have children. But in Isaac/Rebekah’s case, God, as with Abraham, had promised them children, children through whom deliverance would come to the world. So it was God’s known will that they have children! We continue:

And Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived.

(Genesis 25:21 NAS)

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That's what God was waiting for. But before you comment on the immediacy of God's answer, the verse does not say *when* Isaac began to pray, but twenty long years passed from the wedding day to child number one. How limited is our patience. Can you imagine waiting till you're 60 for your first child?

God had created a need by withholding something

- a) they both wanted,
- b) He had promised,
- c) the absence of which brought reproach.

Oh, the wisdom of our God! Thus, when Rebekah became a mother-to-be, the jubilation no doubt was intense. God had answered their prayers at last! Now it would be safe to assume, using the logic of man, that God in answering her prayer, owed her a trouble-free pregnancy and a perfect baby, and everyone would live happily ever after. Isn't that what answered prayers are all about? No, beloved, it's not. Verse 22 begins with the assumption that she was to bear twins and that she already knew it. Oh, modern technology, how many decades you are behind God! But, lo and behold, a not-so-perfect pregnancy, and Rebekah bellows out to God in bitterness. She asks of God the question of the ages!

But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it be so, then why am I this way?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.
(Genesis 25:22)

On the surface, the question is legitimate. But beneath the surface lies the whole concept of answered prayer and the sovereignty of God. "God, we prayed for a child, and you've given me two. If this is your answer to my prayer, then *why am I this way?* God, we prayed for a child and expected nine trouble-free months, but I'm miserable. If you heard my prayer, and this is your answer, then *why am I this way?*" Now twins were not a common Biblical occurrence. Only two other sets are even mentioned in the Bible. But either way, Rebekah was getting more than she'd bargained for, and she did the right thing. She went to inquire of the Lord.

Now before we consider God's answer, we'd best take a closer look at what was behind Rebekah's question. Her question was: "God, this child is an answer to prayer and a fulfillment of a divine promise that was Your idea in the first place. *If that be so, then why am I this way?* Why should I have problems? Surely these

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children will be healthy, won't they, Lord? Surely these children will be emotionally stable? Surely these children won't rebel or embarrass us, will they Lord? God, these are your children. Why, then, am I THIS way?"

Let's first look at her question through the lens of family relationships, parents and children; then through the wide-angle picture of all of life's prayers and answers. *If it be so, then why?* First, the issue of children, God, parents, and free will. Rebekah sensed conflict within her womb. These two kids were fighting before they ever saw daylight. Yet they were an answer to prayer! Could the children they prayed for be potential rebels and still be God's answer to their prayers? You'd better believe they could!

Where does the Scripture promise you trouble-free children? (Or trouble free anything?) We all could have been or could be better parents. Our obligation before God is to train them up in the way they should go as honestly as we know how at the time we have them. This lesson is not designed for one second to minimize the responsibility of parents to teach each child line upon line, precept upon precept, loving them all the while. But the choices of life are theirs! We can lead them to water, salt their oats; but the choice to drink of the water of life, and to keep drinking, is theirs to make.

While we are desperately accountable for what we teach our children and how we live before our children, lest we forget, neither we bear the responsibility for their sins, nor they for ours. We need to read again from Ezekiel 18 (from the NIV).

For every living soul belongs to me, (says God) the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.

Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right. (Ezekiel 18:4,5 NIV)

He lists 7 things a righteous man does in verses 5-9.

...that man is just, says the Lord, and he will surely live. (Ezekiel 18:9b NIV)

10 But suppose he has a violent son, who sheds blood or does any of these things, though the father has done none of them. (Then He lists all these things.) Will such a man (this son) live? He will not! Because he has done all these detestable things, he will surely be put to death and his blood will be upon his own head. (Ezekiel 18:10 NIV)

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Now take it one more generation: Suppose this evil son has a son who sees all the sins his father commits, and though he sees them, he does not do them... (Then it lists again all these detestable sins of the father that the son does NOT do.) He will not die (he won't be accountable) for his father's sin. He will live. But his father will die for his own sin. Yet, you ask, why does the son not share the guilt of his father?

The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.

Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his (own) ways, declared the sovereign LORD.
(Ezekiel 18:20,30a NIV)

We are responsible to train them, to lead them, to love them. But we cannot be totally accountable for their sins, should they stray from God's way. Nor can we take the glory for their victories, proud though we are when they walk in the Light. Theirs are the decisions that ultimately determine the course of their lives.

And you young people or young adults who are listening, stop blaming all of your weaknesses and all of your problems on your parents. Like the grandson in Ezekiel chapter 18, you can actually profit from your parents' mistakes. Stop blaming them or God for your choices. Stand before God with honesty and give Him the reigns of your life and say, "Dear Lord, I am responsible for my own choices." It will set you free!

The problem with the argument that if our children don't turn out perfectly, we're totally to blame, is—it's blasphemy! It's blasphemy because it sets us up above God. You say, how is that? It's because God, the perfect Father, hasn't batted anywhere near 1,000 with His children, because He chose to give them a free will. He gave Adam everything He had, and all of Himself as both a Father and as God. But Adam rebelled! He chose to disobey! Went his own way! Did his own thing! Does that make God a failure as a parent? That would be blasphemy! Nothing God does is less than perfect! Look at God's chosen ones, His children, the children of Israel. He loved them, He fed them, He taught them, He disciplined them. But He wrote of them that they were a stiff-necked people, strong-willed, and many would go their own way. The most encouraging passage in the Bible to

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the parents of teenagers in rebellion ought to be Isaiah 1:2-3:

Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken:
(Isaiah 1:2a NIV)

Here's what He said as the verse continues,

"I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.

The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manager,
but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."
(Isaiah 1:2b,3 NIV)

We live in an age of parental enlightenment. Parents today are blessed with more seminars, workshops, workbooks, and manuals on child-raising than at any time in history. And we are accountable to drink in and apply what we can. What a blessing! But you know what? You can roll your child in a batter of Bill Gothard, sprinkle him liberally with James Dobson, bake him for days in a pan of Howard Hendricks, and give him a coating of Chuck Swindoll for flavor, and that won't guarantee you that at a given time in his/her life he/she won't jump out of the pan and into the fire. And you can't blame Gothard, Hendricks, Dobson, Swindoll, God, or yourself. Praise God that so many do not rebel and praise God, if they do, usually it is only for a season. But I have seen parents destroy themselves with guilt as they waited, and as they wondered, where did I go wrong?

The point is, children, both good and bad, are a part of the plan of God and He weaves their rebellion as well as their obedience into the pattern of grace for your life and the darker threads merely create the backdrop from which the golden cords form their patterns of character. And Rebekah's question was a revelation that indicated she did not yet fully grasp God's purpose in child-bearing. God's question to her and to you and to me, was and is, "If you were to know before your children were born which ones would rebel or bring you grief, would you choose not to have them? Would you not thus be playing God?"

One of the most penetrating illustrations of this truth can be found in Dr. John White's fascinating book, Parents in Pain. In it, he talks about his experience as He prayed for his second child. "I remember a sunny summer day in Paris," Dr. White begins, "when I knelt in a beautiful park to pray for a second child. Four years had passed since the birth of our first child and we were impatient for a larger family. As time passed we consulted clinics,

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but our apparent infertility had no physiological explanation. My prayer was earnest, but routine. It included an oft-repeated clause in my proposed contract with God, which ran roughly, 'Of course, I want the child to be a credit both to me and to you. I would like him or her to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, I would rather do without.' A thought exploded like a bomb in my brain." He went on, "From the cloudless blue the reply seemed to come, 'What about me and Adam?' Instantly I knew what He was saying. God had created us in His image with wills of our own and therefore with the capacity to choose to please God or to displease Him, to obey Him or to rebel against Him. We chose not God's way, but our own. God must have known in advance what would happen. Past, present, and future are all one to Him. He must have foreseen the wars, the cruelty, the whole horror of human history. Yet knowing, He still gave us the gift, not of mere existence, but of life."

"The theological problem is enormous," he continues, "with horror, I saw not only what God was asking me, but the selfishness and shallowness of the escape clause in my proposed contract. Was I willing, like God, to give the gift of life whatever the consequences might be, no matter how my child might choose to use that life? A hundred ugly possibilities flashed on the screen of my mind. A growing fear filled me. I was asking God to let me bring life into being. He was telling me I would not have control of what the fruit of my body might do with the life I gave. Was I still willing to give life to someone who might bring me humiliation, pain, disgrace?" Dr. White goes on, "In a moment of terrible despair and grief have you ever wished that one of your children had never been born? Or have you wished that he or she might conveniently die or disappear? How many times have you cried, 'I just cannot take any more?' Perhaps your pain and shame may have been made worse by the fact that you had yet to learn the most basic rule of all. You cannot ever control another human being, even if that human being is your own child. "It was not easy for me to say," Dr. White concludes, "Yes, give me the power to beget another child whatever course that child may eventually choose in life.' But I said it. And I meant it. When I got to my feet I was not the same person as when I knelt down."

There's a postscript to that story. The result of that prayer was the birth of their second child, a boy. On a radio broadcast, Dr. White shared a little of the heartache that he and his wife

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ultimately experienced as a result of the rebellion in that child's life. It had led to humiliation, discouragement, threats, and even to the thought of leaving the ministry God had given him. But it also has since led to a deeper ministry because not only can he now speak to parents with wisdom, but also with the experience of heartache. God has woven through the fabric of his life the thread of the revelation He gave him that sunny day in Paris.

So Rebekah's problem (and ours) is often the absence of understanding of God's plan for our lives. The children we pray for may not turn out exactly as we plan. Neither did God's. They are still God's will for our lives! Rebekah sensed the struggle and cried, "We prayed. If it be so, then why?" But though childrearing happens to be the subject of this passage, the principles involved go far, far deeper than that. The truth is, we ask that question about nearly everything in our lives that doesn't turn out the way we planned. "Lord," you may cry, "I prayed for God's mate. You gave him to me, and after years of happiness, or years of struggle, he left me. There was adultery and finally a divorce. But I had prayed. If it be so, then why?" Or "Lord, I prayed for that job. Every piece fell into place. I know it was your will! Now I've been fired, humiliated, confused. I know it was your will! If it be so, then why?" "Father, I made a decision to enter that school or college based on Your leading in answer to prayer. Now I haven't made it. I tried hard, but I failed. I know it was Your will. If that be so, then why?"

That's man's complaint and his problem is that he is praying for the superficial, but God is dealing in the supernatural. And until we get God's perspective, like Rebekah, we'll cry, "If it be so, then why?" God has answered Rebekah. In verses 23-26 He gives her the cause.

And the Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb;
And two peoples shall be separated from your body; And
one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older
shall serve the younger." (Genesis 25:23 NAS)

God says, "Rebekah, I've got the whole thing worked out. I knew in eternity past about the twins you are carrying. I know you sense a struggle within you. That's only the beginning. I plan to use that struggle, that conflict between those two boys, even their rebellion, to accomplish a purpose so far beyond the scope of your family, your mind will be boggled by it all! In your womb, Rebekah, are two nations. In your womb, Rebekah, are two

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distinct peoples. They won't be equal in strength, and the power struggle won't turn out the way you think it will. The older will actually serve the younger. You ask Me why, Rebekah? Because they have a free will, Rebekah, and because I have a plan that encompasses even the choices they will make, and turn them for My glory."

It was as if He said to Rebekah, "You're special, so I've chosen you to bear special children. Not perfect children, Rebekah--anyone can raise perfect children--but special children. You train them the best you can, and I'll use them the best I can to change you. God has plans, Rebekah; relax! Things may not turn out the way you planned, Rebekah. You may not go down in history as God's model mother. You may cry a lot, Rebekah, but relax. You say, 'If it be so, then why?' God answers, I have a plan, that's why!"

When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. [Fancy that—God was right!]

Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau.

And afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them.

(Genesis 25:24-26 NAS)

Rebekah must have pondered much what God had told her. Even as they came forth from the womb, God's prophecies began to unfold. Have you ever wondered how Mary, the mother of Jesus, must have felt as He grew up in that carpenter's shop, as He stayed behind that day in the Temple to be about His Father's business, as He began to minister to His people and was rejected by His own, as He (the promise of God for the ages) hung on a Roman cross? Must she not have pondered, "God, this was to be Your anointed. You gave Him to me to deliver His people. If it be so, then why?" Along the way, we as parents do not often see the deeper purposes of God. We see our expectations dashed into despair. We see our children struggle as Rebekah did. We see them apparently fail to accomplish their mission as Mary did. But, oh, the deeper purposes of our God. That's why we turn our children over to Him and trust Him to use them any way He sees fit. The Bible goes on to describe in detail in the chapters that follow, the conflict and the consequences of these two boys' lives. And from those lives we see some pitfalls to look for as parents

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and as children. But for this lesson, let's look a little closer at the concept.

We've had a pretty healthy view of the question, but we've only touched on the answer, and a simple answer to this kind of question will not do. The question is: *If we are God's children, and in the process we pray, why then in the end don't things turn out the way we planned?* For a closer look at the heart of God where this incident is concerned, we will have to turn to Romans, chapter nine, verses 1-24. Here is Paul's answer to Rebekah's question. The passage begins with Paul's grief.

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,

that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.

For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,

who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenant and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,

(Romans 9:1-4 NAS)

Paul said: "Things haven't turned out the way we expected. God's chosen have chosen not to follow Him. They've had it all on a silver platter, but they have rebelled and rejected the way." Paul was brokenhearted, ready if he could have, to give up his own salvation for theirs. (Have you ever had that kind of burden for the lost? For your own children?) This wasn't in the playbook. This wasn't in Paul's script. It wasn't supposed to end this way. For centuries the Jews had waited for the Messiah. Now Messiah comes, and they miss Him! You can almost hear Paul say, "If it be so, then why?"

So you can underline "I have great sorrow" in verse 2, and "For the sake of my brethren" in verse 3, and you have the essence of Paul's grief. Now if you will underline the first half of verse 6, you'll have the essence of Paul's argument: "But it is not as though the Word of God has failed." (Oh, what a statement!) There's where Paul shifts gears and moves from man's free will to God's perfect sovereignty. Paul moves from the superficial to the supernatural. He says, "No, it didn't turn out circumstantially as planned. But God's promise didn't fail." As with Isaac and his boys, God foreknew the blindness of Israel and He simply used

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their rejection to open the Kingdom to the Gentile.

So in verses 6 and 7, he says, “Now the true children of Isaac are all who believe, Jew and Gentile alike.” So even man’s rebellion serves to build the kingdom for others. Are you listening, Rebekah? You should be! Look who Paul pulls out of the hat for an illustration. He turns on his big screen Sony and runs his VCR back to Genesis, channel 25, and in slow motion, he resurrects none other than Rebekah herself as “Exhibit A” to make his point. Look at Rebekah:

...when she had conceived twins, by one man, our father Isaac;

for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose according to his choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls

it was said to her, “THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER.”

Just as it is written, “JACOB HAVE I LOVED, BUT ESAU HAVE I HATED.”
(Romans 9:10b-13 NAS)

Paul says, “Rebekah, listen. You’re God’s key witness. You were dismayed at the conflict within you, but God had a purpose. God had a plan. So your sons would be a disappointment. So God’s sons, the Israelites, would be a disappointment as well. But God would use Jacob and Esau’s contention and God would use Israel’s rejection, and weave it all into the ‘all things’ of life. So don’t say God made a mistake. Sure, Esau made a mistake; sure, Jacob made a mistake; sure, Israel made a mistake. But God takes even our mistakes and uses them to bless the world and to teach us.” Your next verse to underline is verse 14, and the essence of Paul’s question:

What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!
(Romans 9:14 NAS)

Paul is asking, “Is God unfair?” Then he answers, “Not on your life.” So before you cry out, ‘If it be so, then why?’ Paul says, be careful to realize God has never been careless, nor ignorant, nor unfair, in His dealings with you. He has a plan.

Scripture says to Pharaoh (an avowed enemy of God) “FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU,”
(Romans 9:17a NAS)

God is saying, “I can and will use anything or anyone in any condition for My glory.” In verses 15-21 Paul asks the question,

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“Who are you to answer back to God (anyway)? Who are you to say why did You...?” Who are you to say to God, “What right did you have to take my job, to allow me this disease, to permit that loved one to die?”

21 Or does not the potter have a right to do with the clay as He chooses? Or have we forgotten who the Potter is?

And then He answers Rebekah’s question once and for all:

22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

23 And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,

Remember the question? “If it be so, then why?” Or verse 20, “God, why did You?” There’s your answer. What if God did this—

...in order that God’s purpose according to His choice might stand,
(from Romans 9:11 NAS)

... that He might make known the riches of his glory
(from Romans 9:23 KJV)

What if God, knowing that marriage would end in a shambles, though He never would have planned it that way, decided to make known the riches of His glory by teaching you to rest in Him. What if God, knowing that job would end in despair, knew also your testimony as the job crumbled, might lead others to follow Him. What if God, knowing you, like Rebekah, desired a son who would walk with God, yet He granted your request even though that son might fling his fist in the face of God? Did His word fail? No. That son made a choice. But what if God used even that son’s rebellion to build into you the qualities of humility, patience, and transparency that never existed before? Is He not to be praised the more?

Tell me, what is the hardest? For a skilled artist to paint a beautiful picture with no interruptions and hang it up for all to see, or to give the brush to a novice, an angry novice, and let him slash at the canvas with seemingly meaningless blobs of color; then when he’s through, have the master artist go back and with flawless perfection paint a beautiful breath-taking scene, using those seemingly useless streaks of color left behind by the rebel to highlight the beauty of the Master’s touch. That’s a real artist! That’s our God! And when He is finished, what began as a

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disaster becomes a masterpiece.

If you're a parent still punishing yourself for your children's lives, let God set you free once and for all, free from the false guilt of their decisions. Like Adam, they've made choices, some wrong choices. Give them to God and just ask Him to use even those choices as the backdrop for His grace. I simply must tell you that the longer you walk with God, the more you realize how perfect is His sovereignty and how limited is our perspective. I seldom feel comfortable using my own experiences in a lesson, but today somehow, I feel it is appropriate, in closing.

When I was about 25 years old, and had been a believer only a few years, God allowed to come into my life a physical problem that involved the presence of (what seemed to me at least) an incredible amount of pain, pain that at times left me totally unable to function. I went to doctor after doctor, to clinic after clinic, and I do not have to exaggerate to tell you I did a lot of crying, and a lot of crying out to God. If I were to paraphrase my prayers during those first years of pain, I would do it this way: "Lord, I've given my life to you. I want to be used of you. But how can you use me when I am literally weakened to the point of collapse? Lord, you called me to serve you, If it be so, then why? Why am I *this way*?" Months went by; then a year passed, then another, then many others. I prayed to be healed. I prayed for relief. Occasionally, I would simply pray for God's will to be done.

God answered the first prayer with a "no". The second He answered by giving me relief only when I could take no more, and only for a season. The third prayer, "Thy will be done," He answered perfectly. That, you see, was the prayer He was waiting for. When I first became a Christian, I had prayed for patience. I had prayed for faith. I had prayed for sensitivity. So God allowed me to have the pain in order to give me the very things I asked for. And all the while, He patiently listened to me murmur and complain.

Now, more than 35 years have passed. As I look back over my life, as all of us "old folks" are prone to do, I have come to at least one inescapable conclusion. It is this: If I could re-live my life, and God would agree to leave out any one thing the second time around, *the very last thing I would ask Him to omit would be that pain*. I realize that God can use anything He chooses

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to accomplish His purposes; but without the pain, without the problems, I would not know my God the same way. I might know about Him, but I would not have entered into what Paul calls the “fellowship of His sufferings”, and I am convinced that the ministry He has so graciously given me would not be the same.

Was it worth it? Oh, yes, it was worth it. You see, God was working with hard clay, and He knew that only severe pain could soften that clay enough for Him to reshape it into His image. God could have healed me. He simply chose rather to give me more of Himself instead. It wasn't as though the Word of God had failed. It was rather, “What if God, that He might make known the riches of His Glory?” Oh, how I praise Him that He overlooked my superficial pleas and gave me supernatural grace instead.

I do not know what might be happening in your life today. I do know that many of you are also experiencing great pain. Some physical pain, others emotional pain, still others financial pain. And like the rest of us, you are prone to cry out to God, “*If it be so, then why?*” May I encourage you right now, to take a deep breath and relax. God *can* remove the circumstances (and He may). But beloved, instead of insisting that He do, why not pray instead, “Lord, if it be thy Will, simply leave the problem and use it, or Lord, if need be, *intensify* the problem that ye might make known the riches of your glory.”

God *can* heal you. God *can* remove the pain. God *can* make you rich. God *can* remove all the conflicts in your life. He *can*. God can also leave the pain, and as He reveals His power through the pain, make you into a whole new person.

Rebekah said, “God, what’s the meaning of this?” God quietly answered, “I’m the meaning of this!” And when God’s voice speaks thus, quietly, like Job, our lips should be silenced except for the sounds of worship.

If It Be So, Then Why?

IF IT BE SO, THEN WHY

In pain we lash out at life's question marks,
As through life's dark shadows we cry.
We've prayed and expected, and now, somewhat dazed,
We ask, "If it be so, then why?"

Why would that child be less
Than all I dreamed he would be?
Why would that marriage, once so serene,
Dissolve for the whole world to see?

Why would there be no security there
When I've prayed for riches and wealth?
Why would my life be stricken with pain
When I've called out to God for good health?

God, you're my Rock, you're my shield, you're my sword;
You're more precious as each day goes by.
Yet, still when I look and find scars in my life,
I ask, "If it be so, then why?"

"Oh, blessed child," His answer resounds,
"This did not spring from My hand;
But now, in the midst of its deadly debris,
Don't you see, child, I have a plan!

"A plan to take that child of yours
Who has so brought you grief and strife,
And turn the blows that fall upon you
Into stripes that can change your life.

"A plan to take the heartache
Of that marriage I wanted to be,
And turn it at last into a life
That others in trouble can see.

"A plan to take the dependence
That came when you lost it all,
And turn it into a life that responds
To God's every breath and call.

If It Be So, Then Why?

Additional questions for focus and application

1- Think back over the last week. Ask yourself, “What people passed through my life and made general statements indicating they had needs?” How did you respond? Did you stop what you were doing and saying *and listen*? Did you find out how you could be a better friend?

2- Using a concordance or topical Bible, see how many instances you can find in Scripture where God opened and closed the womb. What basic principle is He trying to communicate?

3- Rebekah was a lot like us. She prayed, and when God’s answer to her prayers was different than she expected, she went to inquire of the Lord. “Why am I *this way*,” she asked. What was she really saying? How many times in your life have you, in essence, asked God that question?

4- Read Ezekiel 18. How does this passage complement but not contradict the concept of training up a child in the way he should go?

5- Memorize Isaiah 1:2-3. Why is this passage such a comfort to the parents of rebellious children?

6- Why is it presumptuous to tell God we will only have children if they won’t rebel? That we’ll only take that job if there will be no problems? That we will marry that person if they’ll always be faithful?

7- How did God answer Rebekah in Genesis 25: 23-26? What aspect of God’s nature makes Him able to see the future?

8- Read Romans 9. Memorize verses 14, 21-23.

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10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230
210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778
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